

# ENHANCING PROFICIENCIES, PRAXIS & PERFORMANCE

By Alan Knox

## INTRODUCTION

A dozen colleagues crafted an article on adult learning and role performance, following completion of the Compendium in 2017. Colleague suggestions of concepts and publications contributed to revisions of the manuscript available on the AAACE learning exchange website. This article entitled Enhancing proficiencies, praxis & performance, on the SCOC site in the adult learning exchange (ALE) is an article in a Knox/Houle collection. The accompanying bibliographic list of publications provide the sources for citations by authors names and publication dates; related to this and other articles in the collection. The intent of the progressive sequence of eight topics in this article is to illustrate contributions from past and current publications to a contemporary rationale regarding the praxis between adult learning and role performance.

## RATIONALE

The EIGHT topics are: 1. Educators, 2 Publications, 3. Systemic Rationale, 4. Resources, 5. Results, 6. Context, 7. Evaluation, and 8. Proficiencies.

**1. EDUCATORS-** Educators of adults use their understanding of participants' expectations about a learning opportunity, and about concepts, methods, and procedures, to estimate a) learner's current relevant experience (knowledge, skills, attitudes/predispositions); and b) their reasons for participation, (Use).

Many articles about education of adults usually include multiple stakeholders (program participants, instructors, and coordinators). People in each of these roles related to learning can help achieve enhanced performance. Concepts (author and date of publication) refer to relevant publications.

Current effective educators can use active learning concepts, and educational technology to assist varied participants [and people who help them learn and enhance performance]. Houle's 1992 bibliographic essay [and related publications on program design and teaching perspectives] explain individual [learning projects, learning to learn, practice adoption]; groups [discussion, circles]; and organizations [quality improvement] as options for educators in various settings.

An early book on Outlines of an emerging field of university study (Jensen, Liveright & Hallenbeck, (1964), was prepared by members of the Commission of professors of adult education (CPAE) about university study to prepare practitioners and scholars for the field. It was expected that programs for an emerging field, would help prepare experienced educators

to achieve transcendent performance. Each of the 1964 CPAE book chapters contributed to a graduate program plan, especially chapter 4 by Houle on emergence of graduate study.

As part of three decades of publications about an expanded rationale, (Peters & Jarvis,1991) edited a book on Evolution and achievements for preparation of transcendent educators, with chapter 9 on leadership and administration for enhanced performance in local communities. The (2016, Knox) hybrid book with digital accessibility, provided a rationale for enhancing proficiencies for praxis between theory and performance. Between 1983 and 1991, a series of books were published by Jarvis [who exemplifies an extraordinary role model and mentor], using international comparative analysis from Europe, North America, and other countries worldwide

A 2021 book by Stake and Visse deepened the usual definition of adult education as a helping profession, by explaining a paradigm of care [which is especially important during the current pandemic]. Active Training by (Silberman, 1993} is a handbook with concepts and procedures for many types of educational activities for adults to enhance actual performance, in the spirit of quality improvement. Online learning (Conceicao & Howles 2091) explains use of technology and simulation for online learning experiences to enhance performance.

The foregoing publications help define effective contributions by educators of adults, for synthesizing many perspectives for the matrix used to plan the 2017 Compendium.

Memoirs, biographies and similar collections of publications and examples by individual educators, provide a distinctive personalized perspective on legacies by multiple cascades of learning; in addition to implications from collections of various publications about educators of adults.

For example (Miller, 2014) was mentioned by a recent university president retiree, who was mentored by Miller, who noted (Houle, 1992 publications; 1980 professions) and (Gardner, 1981, self-renewal; 1984, excellence; 1988, leadership); as two mentors who were especially important to him. (Houle,1992, publications, and most of his books were the equivalent of a memoir, because they implicitly and collectively recounted his career, assessment of the field, and his contributions. (Knox, 2016) with the bibliographic essay, provided an update for publications between 1992 and 2016; and (Cervero, 1988), augmented Houle's professional learning for an update on learning and performance.

Jarvis's books between 1983 and 1991 are the equivalent of a memoir; as was (Davis 1988) editing of the Stake Symposium, regarding his connections with educational evaluation. Other comprehensive publications about educators of adults who transcend routine practice include: Kasworm C, Rose,A. & Ross-Gordon,J. (eds) 2010; and Ross-Gordon, Rose, A.7 Kasworm, C (eds) [including Ch.11 on professionalization;] by providing foundations for explaining contributions

of learning and proficiencies, to guide praxis interactions in educational activities that result in sustained effective learner performance.

Current public issues [local, national, global] related to: poverty, immigration, health, employment, community, and polarization; provide ample opportunities for prepared educators of adults to assist local practitioners in caring occupations [counseling, health, faith, social work, immigrant settlement, retirement]; using hybrid methods that combine interpersonal discussion and distance learning technology.

**2. PUBLICATIONS** - Teaching, learning and enhanced performance are important topics for effective educators of adults. Current educators have available publications from the past three decades. Earlier publications include; Houle's major books such as (1980, on Design (second ed) [esp pp 131-149 ; Continuing learning in the professions; 1980; The 1992 literature of adult education [esp pp.59-119]; with an updated bibliographic essay in (Knox, 2016); ;along with eight professional books by (Jarvis,1982-1991) ; and excellent publications about learning and performance by Sharan Merriam and colleagues especially (Merriam & Brockett,1997) and (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner,2007). Pratt and associates (2016) book explains Five Teaching Perspectives [along with corresponding implications.]

Recent AAACE decennial Handbooks: Kasworm and Associates (2010) and Rocco and Associates (2020) [with Chapter 13 on program development].; with about one third of the chapters on learning, teaching and program development, along with concluding chapters on future directions, which provide a review of past and future topics of interest. The 2017 Compendium includes: volume 1 on learning and volume 2 on teaching and learning, for about half of the 80 chapters. Silberman's 1998 book on active training is relevant to much of adult and continuing education, especially regarding ways to enhance sustained performance.

One implication is that there are many relevant publications about ways to provide effective options for educators who want to enable program participants and related stakeholders to be familiar with program content, procedures, and evaluation regarding sustained and enhanced performance. A related question is about the extent and nature of educator's preferences for this option.

**3. SYSTEMIC RATIONALE** - A third consideration is about systemic influences on emphasis regarding use, results, and applications; beyond widespread expressions by adult participants that they prefer to be active users of education, not just recipients.[This preference is related to the distinction between preparatory education which typically assumes uncertain future applications, based on established curricula and teacher oriented guidelines; compared with adult and continuing education opportunities, with participants as volunteers for learning, anticipating educational programs that are responsive to their various experiences and preparation.]

One resource for planning and evaluating responsive educational programs for adult learners, is availability of an open systems model regarding resources, processes, outcomes, influences, and feedback. (Katz & Kahn, 1966) is such an open systems rationale/logic model, which has been recommended for projects that receive external support. (Rayburn, Turco & Davis, 2017) is a recent book about excellent continuing professional education for health professionals, in which multiple chapters, collectively recommend ways to enhance most aspects suggested by an open systems model.

Societal issues regarding various adults dealing with change and learning, along with potential support for responsive educational opportunities; seem to provide desirable conditions for transcendent educators of adults.

For example, with the availability of an excellent systemic model for planning and evaluation, and an excellent example from professional development from health professionals, what might be a next step? One starting point might be to explore other types of high priority continuing education programs, and use of potential external support, on which able educators are prepared to proceed, and include sharing of evaluation feedback for use by colleagues in the field.

**4. RESOURCES** - Each educational program for adults has multiple inputs/resources, available procedures, and the other ingredients on which an effective program depends. Examples include funding, facilities, staff, volunteers, and cooperation. Program coordinators, working with related stakeholders and committees; can assist organizations and associations to use (SWOT) analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; [or strategic planning, or visioning, or futures forecasting] to identify current and desired resources. [In pages 81-87, Houle (1992) summarized innovations regarding learning exchanges and educational brokering; and the Kellogg foundation subsequently funded demonstration projects in public libraries

Relevant resources may not be recognized due to a focus on money or neglect of in-kind assistance, or unawareness of potential collaboration. This broad recognition of potential cooperation was included in (1973, CPAE) regarding graduate programs. (Cervero's 1988) book included practical suggestions related to professional learning, in addition to (Houle' 1980) book; to suggest multiple resources for professional development. Many (2017) Compendium chapters refer to multiple resources for various programs. Multi-ethnic programs can attract unusual resources (Cassara, 1990); (Tennant & Pogson, 1995) recognize specific resources related to the workplace for programs that include enhanced performance; and the 2019 futures planning quarterly Adult Learning series by (Brooks,2019) explores reflection as a source of understanding opportunities as well as threats. The foregoing examples suggest potential for innovative transactions, using the many available types of resources that are possible.

**5. OUTCOMES/RESULTS** - Each educational activity can produce distinctive results for individual program participants, as well as collective groups and organizations. As illustrated by quality improvement activities, a range of Deming types of staff development procedures are available that illustrate a variety of results and effective educational activities. One type includes (Houle,1996) design model; and (Houle,1980) Learning in professions, on professional standards and expectations for excellent performance (knowledge, skills, attitudes). Another type is (Silberman, 1998) on Active learning and demonstrated performance applicable to many kinds of adult learning activities. Contemporary use of educational technology, such as (Bauman,2013); and Conceicao & Howles,2021) illustrate available ways to develop and use computer-based interactive simulations.

**6. CONTEXT** -Local and regional educational activities, especially those intended to address outcomes such as enhanced performance, can recognize important societal influences at local, organizational, national, and international levels. (Barker, 1968) provides an eco-psychological perspective that has been used at local and organizational levels, and it and similar methodologies have been demonstrated at broader societal levels. A contextual analysis at university, agency, and family levels was focused on health connections with local residents (Martin and Associates, 2015). Local social and political connection with community issues have been explored with a focus on community development (Boyte,2004). A report on community development plans and procedures in an urban neighborhood with residents from many countries; demonstrated program effectiveness (Kari & Skelton, 2007), but subsequent national influences suggest a caution about global influences. National polarization related to demographic and value differences suggest four distinct clusters, which provide a provocative perspective, with current and future implications (Packer, 2021). The resulting polarization suggests a rationale for statewide cooperation among educators of adults, to provide program opportunities valued by multiple clusters of residents.

**7. EVALUATION** - Evaluation feedback related to all open system components (resources, process, outcomes, context) can address aspects of a basic dynamic of a systemic model. In addition to familiar use of survey research analysis of quantitative data, qualitative case analysis to explore valuable understandings of interpersonal connections, can help explain how things work. (Stake, 2010). Evaluation can also be used in the spirit of quality control, to identify negative influences and explanations for misrepresentation (Glass, 2008). [Stake was a mentor for Glass] Utilization of evaluation findings is an emphasis of (Patton, 2008); who was a contributor to a major text on evaluation, by Fitzpatrick & Associates (Third ed) 2004. Valid evaluation procedures have become even more important, in an era of polarization and disinformation.

**8. PROFICIENCY** - Typical educational opportunities for adults in North America, Europe and some other nations, recognize the combinations of knowledge, skills and predispositions

(proficiencies) that are important to individual adults, whose learning activities are also connected to program priorities and broad societal influences. As a result, surveys of participants who volunteer for learning (Johnstone, 1965) explains a great variety of motives and characteristics. A comprehensive volume on learning in adulthood (Merriam & Associates, 2007) cites sources of such variation. A perspective on the importance of transformative learning is explained in Compendium, 2017 article 6 by Taylor & Cranton) which recognizes the importance of societal and emancipatory interpretation, but less on influences directly related to performance. Improving professional learning (Knox,2016) intended for educators of adults, and based on many case examples, with a proficiency rationale, and a bibliographic essay, concludes with four guidelines (responsiveness to learner use of conclusions, creative use and connection to learner experience and intended outcomes, enhancing performance, and use of feedback. Self-efficacy, as (Bandura, 1997) suggests, learners progress from knowledge [proficiency] to application. Recognition of class and caste distinctions can help educator's responsiveness to diversity (London, & Associates 1963). Rural residents may resent their stereotyped characterizations, and limited opportunities (Cramer,2016; Hochschild,2016). (Tillich,1952), in Learning to be, and Compendium article 6 on a loving life, provide implications. The foregoing publications and concepts are relevant to adult learning and enhanced performance.

## CONCLUSION

In the spirit of Cy Houle's legacy of publications to guide future directions, part two of his 1992 book on the literature of adult education, pages 59-149; suggests page numbers for sections on learning and performance; and in the middle of the article on Cascades of Learning, a potential future task for educators would be to digitize such excerpts, along with highlights from subsequent publications since 1992. The results could contribute to updating Stubblefield's 1992 history on adult education in the American experience, to explore recent publications and trends with implications for future directions in the coming decade.

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